PLANNING FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP: INSIGHTS FROM A STUDY OF PRINCIPALS OF EXEMPLARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

As local school boards plan for the employment of effective leadership teams, they may address different concerns than those articulated by state and national reformers. In particular, they may seek school leaders whose values and practices fit closely with the community's cultural expectations. Nevertheless, the cultural responsiveness of school leaders may turn out to be more complex than simple alignment of values and practices with prevailing cultural norms. This study provided insight into such dynamics by illuminating the ways principals negotiated school reform in the context of four quite different rural cultures. In particular, the principals did not simply adhere to cultural norms, but instead deployed a combination of culturally resonant and culturally dissonant practices. Community culture in these districts tended to circumscribe leadership by rendering certain practices as intelligible and other practices as discordant. Principals who made use of intelligible practices, however, cultivated trust and gained community support—conditions that, ironically, gave them scope to use more innovative leadership than these traditional communities might otherwise accept. The study's findings suggest that local planners (e.g., boards of education) might want to adopt a broad view of cultural responsiveness when they prepare for leadership succession or seek replacements for key administrators.

INTRODUCTION

Effective school leadership is a concern of policy makers at national, state, and local levels although the specific concerns of planners at the different levels may vary considerably (e.g., Dutro, Fisk, Koch, Roop, & Wixson, 2002; Elmore, 1993). Notably, the focus of national and state policy makers and planners on widespread adoption of particular reforms differs—and in some cases differs sharply—from the focus of local school boards (e.g., Labaree, 2000; Lee, 2002; Moss, 2004). Charged with stewardship over educational services in their community, school board members, particularly in some districts, pay more attention to providing education that is consonant with cultural expectations and with the community's perceived needs than to addressing national needs and priorities or positioning the district for improved performance (e.g., Labaree, 2000; Lutz & Merz, 1992).

Arguably, an important part of the planning undertaken by a school board focuses on the selection and support of the leadership team that will shape the district's future in ways that are attentive to the community's best interests (e.g., Gratto & Little, 2002). Indeed, according to some educational writers, the selection of the superintendent is the most important function of a school board because it links the board's vision of educational aims with a mechanism for realizing those aims (e.g., Glass, 2001). At the same time, recent evidence suggests that the entire leadership team in a district plays a significant role in determining its direction and ultimately influencing its performance (e.g., Parrett, 2005; Phillips & Phillips, 2007). The involvement of the board in the selection of principals and supervisors as well as the superintendent therefore represents a critical part of their efforts to position the district for its future.

In the exercise of this function, moreover, school boards inevitably respond to (and interpret) the interests of their local communities (Lutz & Merz, 1992). In an important sense, then, school boards represent the starting point for culturally responsive leadership. In addition, as an emerging body of literature suggests, the legitimacy of school leaders depends on their ability to navigate a course between state and national pressures for accountability and responsiveness to local culture and context (e.g., Dutro et al., 2000; Labaree, 2000). This ability represents the perspective on "culturally responsive leadership" to which the findings of our study speak.

This view of culturally responsive leadership, however, differs considerably from what many

theorists mean when they use the term (e.g., Bolman & Deal, 2003). In particular, many leadership theorists view cultural leadership as primarily being directed inward to the culture *of the school* rather than outward to the culture *of which the school is a part*. Recommendations for the practice of school leadership do incorporate the dictum that superintendents and principals ought to cultivate parent and community involvement, but rarely is this taken to mean that school leaders ought to shape leadership practices in consideration of community norms and aspirations.

Some researchers and theorists in the field of educational administration, however, have explored cultural leadership in this wider sense. Notable among these is Philip Hallinger. In the late 1990s he and various colleagues began to consider the relationships among leadership practices, the culture external to the school, and performance outcomes. In particular, these researchers focused on school leadership in non-Western countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia. A few studies in the United States have also investigated the influence of community culture on principals' leadership, but this emerging thread in the literature is still relatively limited. The current study contributes to the emerging literature by exploring ways in which leadership provided by principals in four rural schools resonated and contrasted with cultural assumptions of the communities in which the schools were located.

Although the study explores these dynamics in the rural context, its fundamental premise—that cultural leadership inevitably encompasses community as well as school culture—may have much wider applicability. One of the authors, for example, examined the implications of a principal's culturally dissonant leadership practices in an inner-city school, and his findings led to conclusions quite similar to those reported here (Woodrum, 1996).

RELATED LITERATURE

The research reported in this paper draws on insights about educational planning and leadership that are neither well elaborated nor widely understood. In fact, as we suggested above, when the term "cultural leadership" is used (e.g., Glanz, 2006), it often refers to a set of practices that attend only to the organizational culture of the school. A few theorists and researchers, however, have used literature about cultural differences to argue that leadership needs to be attentive not only to school culture but to community culture as well (e.g., Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996; Heck, 1998).

This idea, while relatively novel, is not particularly new. Getzels and his associates, for example, introduced this concept in the 1960s, almost 30 years before any educational research was conducted to examine its applicability and implications (Getzels, Lipham, & Campbell, 1968). Somewhat later, work in the field of organizational sociology also focused on the relationship between the culture external to organizations and the culture of those organizations (e.g., Sadler & Hofstede, 1976).

Theoretical Insights

Situating schools within local communities as well as within broader state and national communities, Getzels and associates (1968) drew attention to the important relationship between communities' cultural values and the thought processes and actions of their educational leaders. According to these authors, a school functions best when its educational administrators plan, enact policies, and deploy practices that are responsive to the culture of the community in which the school is located. This insight prompted Getzels and associates to challenge fellow educational administrators to undertake systematic studies of the relationship between culture and school leadership as well as to develop and use culturally responsive leadership practices.

In the years following these initial insights about culturally responsive leadership, some researchers responded to Getzels' challenge, and currently an emerging body of empirical work addresses the issues Getzels and his associates raised. Studies conducted by Hallinger and his colleagues represented forerunners among these investigations. These researchers drew not only on the ideas presented by Getzels and associates but also on constructs developed by Geert Hofstede (1983, 2001), an organizational sociologist whose empirical work focused on cultural differences among employees of one large, multi-national corporation.

Through this work, Hofstede identified five dimensions of cultural difference: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation (e.g., 1983). According

to Hofstede, "power distance" reveals the extent to which hierarchical power relations are accepted by a culture. In cultures with high power distance, all members—including less powerful ones—accept the fact that power is distributed unequally. Hofstede defined "individualism" as the extent to which members of a culture concern themselves with their own needs and interests and those of people in their immediate families. In contrast to this orientation, members of highly collectivist cultures focus on the needs and interests of a wider kinship or community group. According to the typology developed by Hofstede, "masculinity" refers to the ways in which roles are distributed between genders, with masculine societies having clearer differentiation of such roles. In masculine cultures, moreover, community members tend to value assertive and competitive behaviors more highly than they value nurturing behaviors. "Uncertainty avoidance," in Hofstede's typology, refers to the extent to which members of a culture are uncomfortable with ambiguity and risk. And "long-term orientation," which is manifested as perseverance or thriftiness, relates to the value a culture places on delayed gratification.

Although Hofstede focused attention on the way cultural dimensions influence the organizational environment and communication within an organization, he did not explicitly consider their influence on leadership. The significance of the linkage between community culture and leadership was, however, a major point made in works by Hallinger and Leithwood (1996, 1998a, 1998b). In fact, these authors claimed that leadership theory was incomplete because it failed to consider community culture. From their perspective, adding culture to leadership theory represented an important and timely contribution especially because schools and other organizations were becoming increasingly diverse and therefore culturally complex.

The work of Hallinger and his associates has prompted others to speculate further about the connection between community culture and school leadership. Walker and Quong (1998), for example, argued that Western leadership practices are often exported to countries throughout the world without consideration given by planners and policy makers to the cultural characteristics of those countries. In fact, these authors claim, funding agencies often pressure school leaders in non-Western countries to adopt Western management practices even when these practices run counter to indigenous cultural beliefs about how schools should work. In these situations, school leaders confront the difficulty of responding to pressures to adopt Western management practices while at the same time meeting the expectations of their local communities. According to Walker and Quong, however, pressures from funding agencies are misguided. From their perspective, school leadership is most effective when it acknowledges and responds to the cultural values and norms of particular communities.

Wong (1998) also considered the impact of culture on school leadership, describing differences in leadership practices between East Asian and West Asian principals. He suggested that cultural differences between East and West Asia significantly influence the leadership practices of school principals in those regions of the world. To support this claim, Wong drew on the work of Hampden-Turner and Thompenaars (1997), which distinguished between Western and East Asian leaders. According to these authors, Western leaders value competition, goal-directed activity, and compliance with explicit rules, while East Asian leaders value community-building, cooperation, and consensus. Nevertheless, Hampden-Turner and Thompenaars claimed that East Asian managers tend to be more adaptable than their counterparts in the West, primarily because they receive training at Western universities and must find ways to fit the management practices they learn into the cultural traditions of their own countries.

The theorists whose ideas were presented in this section argued for a new approach to leadership that is culturally responsive, and they identified the need for empirical work that further investigates the connections between culture and school leadership. In addition some educators who write about the principalship also claim that deep understanding of cultural context is a necessary basis for planning school initiatives and leadership approaches that are likely to gain traction in the face of local circumstances (Howe & Townsend, 2000; Howley, Pendarvis, & Woodrum, 2005). Nir (1999) cautions, however, that excessive responsiveness to community concerns may cause principals to seek rapid solutions to problems rather than taking the time needed to analyze complexities and develop careful plans.

An emerging body of literature focuses on the view of cultural leadership represented in the theoretical literature discussed above, and many of the relevant studies concern school leadership in countries other than the US. For example, a set of case studies of principals' leadership of educational reforms in three Thai schools provided some evidence of the connection between community culture and school administration (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000, 2001). Drawing on Hofstede's work, these researchers identified the characteristics of traditional Thai culture as high power distance, collectivist attitudes and behaviors, high level of uncertainty avoidance, and high feminism. Their study found that these cultural characteristics conflicted to some degree with the progressive educational reforms that the principals were trying to implement. In order to handle the mismatch between the values underlying Thai culture and those supporting the educational reforms, the principals found it necessary to adapt the reform practices. Each was able to modify the educational reforms in ways that made them acceptable to Thai teachers and community members.

Studies of the confluence and contradictions between school leadership and community culture also have been conducted in Botswana (Pheko & Linchwe, 2008), Canada (Foster & Goddard, 2002; Jules, 1988), Mexico (Cisneros-Cohernour & Merchant, 2005), and Singapore (Bolman & Deal, 1992), as well as in racially, ethnically, and geographically distinct communities in the United States (e.g., Capper, 1990; Dwyer, 1985; Kushman & Barnhardt, 2001; Lomotey, 1987; Porras, 2003; Woodrum, 1999).

Whereas many of these studies support a perspective similar to that put forth by Hallinger and Kantamara (2000, 2001) in which effective school leaders mediate between school expectations and community culture (e.g., Bolman & Deal, 1992; Dwyer, 1985), other studies conclude that effective leadership primarily embraces cultural expectations (e.g., Jules, 1988; Kushman & Barnhardt, 2001; Lomotey, 1987). From this perspective, cultural responsiveness not only entails attentiveness to local views about what schools should accomplish, but it also involves the use of leadership practices and advocacy of educational practices that make sense within the framework of the local culture.

METHODS

This study was conducted under the sponsorship of a Midwestern state's department of education, which sought information about a group of schools that served communities with large numbers of economically disadvantaged students (40% of the school population or more), yet were achieving high pass-rates on the state's accountability tests. Our research team selected rural schools in which math achievement was considerably higher than what might be expected based on demographics alone.

Spending approximately five days in each of the schools, team members conducted semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Interviews included one-on-one conversations with adult informants (administrators, teachers, parents, and community members) and focus-group discussions with students. Approximately 24 interviews (lasting from 30–90 minutes) were conducted at each site. All interviews were transcribed, and transcripts were prepared for analysis with Atlas-Ti software.

Initial coding made use of four leadership codes for principals—autocratic practices, democratic practices, transactional practices, and transformational practices. We coded all examples of "top-down" leadership as *autocratic*. We coded as examples of *democratic* leadership quotes in which the principal was described (or described him or herself) as sharing governance, distributing leadership among staff members, or delegating authority. Very few quotes were coded as *transactional*, suggesting that this type of leadership (which involves the use of rewards and sanctions to accomplish organizational purposes as well as the use of practices associated with "management-by exception") was not often used in these high-performing schools (Bass & Avolio, 1994). By contrast, the code *transformational* was applied more often, with quotes exemplifying many of the practices (e.g., individualized consideration, idealized influence) typically associated with the term. We also identified one emergent code that related to school leadership. We used *student-centered leadership* to characterize the many occasions when participants talked about principals' direct efforts to provide support and encouragement to individual students. With data coded in this way, it was possible to develop a picture of each principal's approach to leadership.

The second round of coding made use of inductively derived codes relating to the culture of each community. We examined the features of each culture by rereading all interview data for each of the schools. Examples of codes relating to culture are: "egalitarianism," "agrarian tradition," "dependency

relations," and "religiosity." Interpretation of coded data permitted us to compare and contrast the communities and thereby to develop at least a partial picture of the salient features of their cultures—their norms and values as well as their expectations for leaders.

The final step in the analysis involved examining the leadership of each principal in consideration of the cultural features of the community in which he or she was working. This process allowed us to identify those leadership practices that seemed to resonate with cultural expectations and those that seemed to conflict.

FINDINGS

The schools were located in four distinct rural communities, which differed in terms of their economic circumstances as well as their cultural features. For example, one community was more dependent on agriculture than the others, and it had less economic stratification. Another community, where timbering was the only business, had a large proportion of families in extreme poverty and a sharp economic divide between rich and poor. Its culture was more clearly Appalachian than that of any of the other communities.

As the descriptions of the schools and communities reveal, the local culture of each place did seem to influence expectations for the practice of school leadership. Nevertheless, in some of the communities, principals were using leadership practices that challenged prevailing norms at least to some degree.

Hilltown

The high school in Hilltown served children from the town as well as those living in the surrounding countryside. Historically a farming community, Hilltown recently began to attract some families from nearby suburbs and even some from a city at some distance from the town. Adults from these families typically commuted to the city to work, and their values differed from those of the long-time residents. A third group also lived in the community: low-income "transplants"—families who had come to the town in order to take advantage of low rents and subsidized housing. The middle-class commuters and the long-term residents (some of whom were teachers in the local schools) tended to be critical of the values and lifestyles of the low-income transplants.

These three groups lived side by side, but they shared only some values and cultural practices. Although members of all groups interacted, the long-term residents and middle-class commuters seemed to have forged an amicable coexistence. Both groups viewed the low-income transplants as unwelcome additions to the community, and both groups seemed to see the school as a place for socializing the children of these residents to accept a set of middle-class values and aspirations.

Because of these dynamics, we found it useful to view the community's culture as a palimpsest in which an older agrarian culture remained partly visible through the overlay of the cultures of the community's current residents. Although commercial farming was no longer a viable enterprise in the Hilltown community, many residents of the town and surrounding countryside still maintained ties to the community's agrarian past. Older members of the community, for example, continued to farm. Some of the younger adults—long-term residents who had grown up in Hilltown—worked in small businesses or taught in the community's schools or in schools in surrounding communities. Others lived in the Hilltown vicinity and commuted to the city.

The cultural values shared by many long-term residents and associated with the community's agrarian heritage included respectfulness, industriousness, frugality, Christianity, and a concern for safety. These values were associated with the practices of neighborliness, helpfulness to others, and routine church attendance. Long-term residents and middle-class newcomers described the community as close-knit, and they viewed the school as an important community institution and source of community pride. Comments from numerous informants illustrated these values and practices. A statement from a teacher who grew up in a neighboring community but had lived and worked in Hilltown for almost 20 years concisely summarized what we heard widely: "I learned respect and I learned hard work, and I learned values."

To some degree these cultural values were shared by middle-class commuters, many of whom had moved to the community because of its "hometown" feel. Several respondents, for example, talked about

Hilltown as a "good place to raise children." The commuters, nevertheless, also held certain middle-class values that long-term residents did not typically share. For example, they appeared to be more willing to exhibit their affluence—building large, expensive houses and driving new sports utility vehicles. They also expected the schools to cater to their children by focusing on college preparatory work. One long-term resident—a professional who was familiar with several of the middle-class commuters—described them in this way:

> There are several of those families in the area. And they demand more from their library, they demand more from the school system. It's not a bad thing. They don't go along with the status quo. They don't go along with a lot of the people who have lived here forever.

The third group in the community included low-income residents, whose cultural values and practices were not well understood and certainly not endorsed by members of the other two groups. Only a few participants in our study were from this group, so our understanding of their culture primarily came from the accounts of long-term residents and middle-class commuters. These accounts, moreover, were mostly negative, portraying the low-income transplants as uneducated, unstable, transient, drug-using malcontents.

School practices at the high school reflected the traditional values of long-term residents. Educators taught students to be respectful of adults and expected them to get along with and help one another. As observers, we picked up on the consequences of these teachings right away: The school had a friendly, organized, easy-going, and productive ambiance.

Many of its teachers had been working in the district for 20 or more years, and most lived in Hilltown or neighboring rural communities. These teachers honored traditional ways of doing things, and they appeared comfortable with hierarchical authority relations so long as they were congenial. The following comment made by one of the teachers illustrated the widely observed preference for directive leadership: "I try to always make sure that I do what the administration tells me to do."

Culturally resonant and dissonant leadership. Mr. B., the high school principal, was new to the job although he had been an assistant and head principal for several years in other districts before coming to Hilltown. Based on self-disclosures provided in the interview, Mr. B. seemed to have a clear sense of his own approach to leadership, which teachers were still in the process of evaluating. One aspect of his approach—student-centeredness—seemed to fit with local expectations. As one teacher noted, "I think he's more involved [with students] than our principal last year."

Students had consistently positive things to say about Mr. B.'s student-centered approach. From the perspective of one student, "He's everywhere. Really, he is. And it's really awesome because you get a sense of security." According to another, "He knows every student that comes his way, and he'll, if you're upset or something, he'll pat you on the back and say, 'Have a good day,' or something. He's just really awesome."

Other features of Mr. B.'s approach to leadership seemed to mesh less readily with local expectations. In particular, what Mr. B. described as his "relational" leadership style was less directive than the teachers and some community members seemed to prefer. He mentioned the need for negotiation between his preferences and community norms as well as expressing some frustration with the time required to engage in such negotiation. And his espoused goal was to work within the existing organizational culture in order to change it. Nevertheless, his strongly held views about leadership made it difficult for him to believe that staff members would see legitimacy in a directive approach. The following excerpt, which makes reference to a peer mediation program that he wanted to institute, provides evidence of his assumptions.

> Well, I'd much rather persuade than be directive . . . I'm much bigger on "buy in." . . . You can't insure the successful implementation of a single idea unless you have staff who agree with you and think it's a good idea and are willing to do whatever it takes to have ownership of it, to make sure it works. And I know, if I start out with a—let's say I pushed that peer mediation through, over the objections of the guidance officer here, who doesn't have buy-in on it then, she has no real incentive to make that work because she has no skin in the game.

Flint

A small 7-12 secondary school, Flint was located in a rural district which figures among the largest in the state. Parents and community members described Flint as a quiet, caring place to live, removed from big-city problems such as drugs and gangs. Flint High School was also an important fixture of the community. As one parent reported, "Flint has always been a school that parents took a lot of interest in. Pride in community: I think that is what it is."

The larger rural community, of which Flint was a part, upheld traditional small-town values, such as self-reliance, support for neighbors, and interconnecting relations that tied individuals together. The school was one of the fundamental institutions in the community, enabling these values to be put into practice.

The strong and long-standing bond between school and community had contributed to a high level of trust between parents and educators. Although educators recognized the challenges that some parents faced, they were generally appreciative of parents' attitudes and efforts to seek the best for their children. Parents and community members also identified their on-going connection with the school as important. Many talked about attending ballgames and helping their children with homework.

Being a part of a large county-wide district, however, had created frustrations for many residents, as well as for some educators. In fact, remembering a time when the present county-wide system consisted of several smaller districts, some members of the Flint community were seeking to reestablish local control. Another community in the district had already succeeded in forming a separate, "deconsolidated" district, and Flint residents were hopeful that they too would be able to win the right to have a separate board of education and administrative staff.

Interestingly, despite interest in local control, the community had not interfered with educators' efforts to change the curriculum at Flint High School so that it better matched the academic content standards adopted by the state. Perhaps because community members trusted the teachers and administrators at the school, they did not seem to want to play a direct role in shaping curriculum content or instructional practices. Apparently, the bid for greater local control appeared to relate less to the practices at the school itself than to practices district-wide. According to community members who supported "deconsolidation," the county-wide district had become too large, impersonal, and unwieldy to be responsive to their concerns.

Members of the high school community unanimously agreed that leadership played an important role in their efforts to improve the school's performance. As many participants explained, a former school administrator, Mr. R, had been the one to start the process of instituting changes. He had initiated the change process by increasing the consistency with which discipline problems were handled. Before Mr. R's employment as an administrator at the school, inconsistent responses to students' misbehavior had failed to curb, and perhaps had even added to, students' disruptiveness in classrooms. Once student behavior was under control, Mr. R turned to other features of the school such as organizational climate and student and faculty motivation.

Mr. R's successor, Mr. J., continued the practices of his predecessor but also instituted more inclusive approaches. Mr. J. described his role as follows:

> My role . . . is to empower the teachers that are in the content areas. It is not to go and tell them that I know more than what they know. It is to take their expertise and channel it in to what we as a group know we have to cover. . . . So my job is to keep [the teachers] on task and meet with them and communicate all the time with data.

Culturally resonant and dissonant leadership. Flint was a conservative rural community that strongly valued order, discipline, and direct and transparent governance. Many of these values were exemplified in the story of Mr. R, who during his time in the district, first as assistant principal and then principal, instituted a discipline policy that brought consistency and order to the behavior of students. Once these changes had been made, the school was then able to turn to issues of curriculum, pedagogy and academic achievement. It was clear that teachers were most appreciative of Mr. R.'s work, and some parents—those who were looking for consistent and fair discipline for their children—were also appreciative. Even the students, albeit grudgingly, admitted that the changes in school climate enabled them to concentrate on their work. The continuation and expansion of these measures during the tenure

of Mr. J., who followed Mr. R., provided evidence that they resonated with the values of the wider community culture.

Another example showed how the wider values of order and fairness affected school practices. In this case, the practice involved a change in the way the school administration assigned faculty members to teach particular courses. Instead of allowing those staff members of longer tenure to "own" the more advanced courses, leaving the less advanced courses for younger faculty, the principal restructured the schedule such that each faculty member would teach some advanced and some less advanced courses. The new system redistributed the talents of the faculty, giving all students a mixture of experienced and less experienced teachers. But additionally, it offered a fairer distribution to teachers of what were perceived to be the "best" classes.

Like many rural areas where the school lies at the heart of the community's identity and comity, Flint valued greatly the direct and even intimate relations and contact between parents and school personnel. But through consolidation measures in the past, those relations had become strained. At the time of our study, schools in the county-wide district appeared to act independently of one another, and this situation threatened the community-held value of interdependence and closeness. Although district leaders had tried to meet the needs of individual schools while also maintaining the involvement of families, this effort had not been entirely successful. And perhaps it was impossible, given the size of the district, to embrace the community's desire for closeness. As a result of these tensions, some parents and community members were taking steps to establish an independent school district.

Lumberville

Lumberville High School was housed in an impressive, new building located in a rural Appalachian region of the state. Like many schools in rural areas, Lumberville loomed large in the economic, historical and cultural life of its community. Administrators as well as classroom teachers wore many different hats (the principal, for example, was also the varsity basketball and track coach). Several of the teachers had attended Lumberville when they were students and returned to teach there.

Parents from wealthier segments of the community as well as school staff often described the school and its community as "just a big family." These parents, by-and-large, expressed the view that teachers were working hard to help their children, and they in turn supported the teachers and judged them to be "as good as you'd find in a lot of big towns."

The school complex served as the geographic and cultural center of the community. Speaking of the extraordinary level of community support for the levy that had financed the building of the new high school (the levy was approved by 83%), one community member said,

> I think it's just because people here really love and support their kids. They feel the [kids] should have the best they can afford. And they appreciate what the school and the teachers do for the kids.

Employment was scarce in the Lumberville district. Graduating students typically found work in the local logging industry, in farming, or they were obliged to travel considerable distances to find employment in more urban areas. Teaching was one of the few professions through which local students might aspire to a middle-class life.

Both citizens and educators agreed that the strong sense of community was one of the most important features of the Lumberville culture. In discussing education in the area, parents and community members often related experiences that tied them to the high school: their participation in sports during their years in school, the prom, beloved teachers. Asked to name the ways they were engaged with the school, established community members tended to cite attendance at sports events, meetings with teachers outside the school, support for construction of the new school buildings, and friendships with educators with whom they had attended school as youngsters, or with whom they maintained good relations now.

Only recently, with families moving into the district from neighboring urban areas had the values of close personal relations and mutual support come under challenge. "When I came here," the superintendent explained, "and for the first probably better than 20 years, it was really good because everyone grew up here and stayed…and everyone knew everyone." In the last 10 years, however, "we now have the urban type kids that will have gangs," the superintendent continued. "This last fall we

really worked hard and I expelled eight outside kids that were starting a gang."

Lumberville educators expressed pride in their work to serve the needs of local students from working-class homes, largely because these students and their families subscribed to the community's cultural values of self-reliance, responsibility, and close interpersonal relations. But working-class parents were not convinced. They believed that the school gave more attention to children from elite families than to other children, and they worried the school's educators were overlooking the needs of children growing up in more modest circumstances. According to one citizen,

> People in this community are basic people. They love their kids and want what's good for them. But they don't always know what that is. They depend on teachers and the school to tell them, and that doesn't always happen.

Unlike the working-class families to whom educators perhaps paid insufficient attention, the impoverished families newly entering the Lumberville community were actively disdained. Educators described them as having little "work ethic," a reliance on "government hand-outs," and no regard for the value of education. Teachers spoke of poverty as a limitation, not only on the individual child's prospects, but also on his or her experiences in life. And they saw the problems associated with poverty as intractable. As one teacher concluded, "We feel like we're fighting a losing battle where we are dealing with parents and generational welfare."

Overall, then, the culture at Lumberville High School focused on respect for authority, compliance, and care for people with long-standing ties to the community. Its organization enabled teachers, students, and staff to have their issues and concerns voiced and addressed. The lines of authority were present at every level: individual teachers created expectations for their classes, and these were prominently displayed in every classroom. Expectations of teachers were spelled out in detail in the *Faculty Handbook.* The principal explained,

I have certain rules that I expect teachers to enforce at the building level. Obviously, the district has more policy that I have to follow. So it is. I mean it's a chain of command; it goes down.

Culturally resonant and dissonant leadership. Mr. H., who was in his first year as principal, claimed that "the single most important role I perform here is to make sure that we . . . I provide an [atmosphere] conducive to learning in terms of discipline." Mr. H. was born and had grown up in Lumberville and seemed to find general support for his no-nonsense approach to education. According to one parent,

> I've seen schools where the classes were rowdy, and students pretty much ran things. I don't see how kids can learn in places like that. I expect my son to act at school the way he acts at home. And I expect his teachers to hold his feet to the fire.

Teachers might sometimes chafe at the expectations placed on them by the principal, but by-and-large, they found that he was supportive of their work and respectful of them as individuals. A teacher commented,

> You might not always agree with him but he's certainly not wishy-washy. I most appreciate the way he handles discipline here: if you've got a problem with a kid then he's right there. He's strict but fair. Discipline doesn't get in the way of teaching… He keeps the lid on.

Paddling was still a feature of Lumberville's—and Mr. H.'s—disciplinary policy. Students were paddled only if their parents had given written permission, and Mr. H. reported that up to 50% of the parents had done so. "I think it's important for them to know," he says, "that there are consequences to their actions."

The close-knit, mutually-supportive fabric of Lumberville's community seemed to be under threat. With increasing numbers of what the superintendent termed "more urban families" moving into the district, leadership appeared unable to address the looming conflict in values. Simply labeling children "gang members" and kicking them out of school did not seem to be an approach that would work for long, even though it was supported and even applauded by many long-term residents of the community.

Amishtown Elementary School

Amishtown Elementary served a rural community where many families were engaged in farming and related businesses. Also within the school's attendance area was a large population of Amish. In fact, 40% of the students who attended the school were Amish. Like most members of this sect, the Amish in

this school community were reserved, respectful, industrious, religious, and quick to offer assistance to their neighbors—both Amish and "English."

The Amish students who attended the school exhibited the qualities valued by their culture. The children—especially the girls—were more reserved than their "English" counterparts. They showed high levels of respect for adults and were quick to help one another. This cultural norm of the Amish children was observed to have some influence on the non-Amish children as well. According to a sixth grade teacher, "I think the Amish children help our English students learn about tolerance and acceptance." When asked about the influence of the Amish children, teachers and parents agreed their presence made a positive contribution to the school overall. Moreover, the values of the community as a whole seemed to reflect the Amish influence. As one community member reported,

> We are a farming community with simple values. We believe in helping one another, being honest and trustworthy, and having respect for one another. I think you can see that in most of our students. The Amish are certainly a factor.

Reflecting and responding to community expectations, Amishtown Elementary School developed a culture of cooperation and supportiveness. The correspondence between school culture and community culture apparently had existed in the more distant past, but it was not always evident. Notably, according to most accounts, the principal prior to the current one sought to impose a "professional" distance between the school and the community.

Nevertheless, for the past four years under new leadership, the older approach has resurfaced. The school has made a concerted effort to act in accordance with the mission: *United Effort, United Responsibility, United Success*. We observed educators encouraging children to help one another, and we often saw children working in pairs or small groups to complete class projects and assignments. In fact, throughout the school, the spirit of cooperation seemed pervasive. Teachers were willing to share ideas with and provide help to one another. The family-like ethos of the school matched community norms as one community member's characterization indicated: "We are a very close knit community—almost like a very large family. People are generous with their help."

The community's culture, moreover, supported cooperation across groups. Amish families helped "English" families and vice versa. As a consequence, students saw examples of cross-group cooperation at home. Many of the teachers, moreover, were native to the community and surrounding area. They, too, had "grown up" with this example.

Culturally resonant and dissonant leadership. The collaborative, democratic leadership style of the current principal seemed to fit in well with the cultural norms of Amishtown. For example, the vision statement adopted under Mrs. A.'s leadership appeared to reflect the cultural values of the community. As a result, it worked to link norms of school practice with norms of community life. For example, just as families helped one another in this agricultural community, teachers helped one another with instructional planning and classroom management. According to a third-grade teacher, "Last year was my first year here. Everyone went out of their way to help me get started on the right foot." A first-grade teacher echoed this sentiment, "We share a lot here. We try to help each other. We feel good about what we've been able to accomplish together, as a team."

Because the school was so open to the community, moreover, parents observed and endorsed teachers' shared vision and cooperative spirit. As one parent put it, "there is a real unity among the staff. Everyone seems to work together and you can see them outside the classroom, even sharing things." Students also seemed to feel comfortable with the school's vision because it supported practices that fit with community norms. A sixth grade student summed up this perspective, "We all work together. You don't single yourself out from everybody. And they [i.e., teachers] don't single just one person out. Everyone works together as a group."

One important way that Mrs. A. provided culturally resonant leadership was to institute programs that addressed needs of the community. For example, she established a special class for Amish seventh and eighth graders. Customarily, Amish children either attend their own parochial schools or attend public schools up through the sixth grade only. Because the Amish parents felt comfortable about allowing their children to attend Amishtown Elementary and because Mrs. A. realized that children would benefit from education beyond the sixth grade, she was able to convince the board and administration to establish the

special class. Enrollment in this class has increased each year for the past three. At the time of our visit to the school, 22 Amish children were in attendance. The parents of the "English" children, however, preferred that their children move on to the junior high school after sixth grade.

Another leadership practice that resonated with community values was the involvement of parents and community members in the daily life of the school. Parents were welcome to visit and provide support to the school, and many volunteered to help teachers in the classroom. Others helped in the kitchen and cafeteria. Parents of children who were having difficulties were routinely included as members of the Intervention Assistance Team, which met monthly. The educators made a special effort to communicate to Amish parents in particular that they were welcome to participate meaningfully in school events, decision-making, and social activities. Leadership that fostered transparency and openness helped build confidence and trust among all members of the school community.

A fund-raising program that Mrs. A. instituted also seemed to resonate with cultural values. Shortly after becoming principal, Mrs. A. organized a group of parents and teachers to figure out how to tap into an already established part of the local culture—the auction—as a way to raise money for the school. They decided the auction would replace the many "fund raisers" at each grade level, which no one really liked and which brought in little money. Mrs. A. and others involved in setting up the auction asked local merchants to donate items. Parents, especially the Amish, donated canned goods, quilts, home-made jellies and desserts. The school auction, held each May on the front lawn of the school, had become institutionalized by the time of our visit, and it attracted hundreds of local citizens and tourists each year. In 2005, the auction raised just over $25,000 for the school.

Like the residents of many conservative agrarian communities, Amishtown's parents and citizens were skeptical about change, especially when it was perceived as coming too rapidly. One critical incident demonstrated how leadership of a curriculum change conflicted to some extent with community values.

Early in Mrs. A.'s tenure as principal, the district adopted a new math program that made use of the constructivist approach favored by reformers. Teachers were involved in the decision to adopt the new program, but parents were unaware until a new school year began with a totally new (and different) math program. Parents suddenly began to experience difficulty when they tried to help their children with math homework. They shared their concerns with one another, and eventually with the school board.

Mrs. A. took a responsive approach to the incident, and she was quick to admit that more should have been done to prepare the parents. Nevertheless, Mrs. A. also expressed the belief that sometimes leadership needs to expose communities to new ideas, rather than slavishly responding to community traditions. Mrs. A. and the teachers saw the new math program as beneficial to students; and because of its focus on cooperative problem-solving, they also saw it as consistent with cultural values. But parents saw the program as unfamiliar and therefore frightening.

Mrs. A. viewed the "disconnect" between educators and parents as unproductive, and she sought to rectify the situation by involving parents in the process of change. Through a series of meetings during which parents were introduced to the new math program, Mrs. A. was able to admit the error of not involving parents from the start while working to re-establish parent involvement in school decision-making. Eventually, these actions restored the community's trust in her leadership.

INTERPRETATION

In all of these school communities, principals were seeking to make educational improvements primarily by using leadership practices that were understandable and acceptable to community members. In two of the school communities—Lumberville and Flint—traditional values supported hierarchical authority relations and therefore tended to foster directive leadership. Equally traditional, but in a somewhat different way, values in the Amishtown community emphasized equality, cooperation, and respect. Leadership there, while directive, was also more collaborative. Hilltown seemed to be in transition. Whereas there was clear evidence among educators and long-term residents of hierarchical practices, newly arriving residents—some relatively affluent and others quite impoverished—were changing community dynamics and providing school leaders with both a wider range of options and at the same time less clarity about the leadership practices that would be considered acceptable.

The differences in expectations can be illustrated by using three of Hofstede's categories of cultural difference. Both "power distance" and "individualism" seemed to distinguish Amishtown from the other three communities. Influenced by agrarian and Amish traditions, members of the Amishtown community did not seem to tolerate much of a power differential across community groups. Rather, respectfulness seemed to pervade relationships and to be bi-directional. Those with more reason to claim a power advantage because of age, wealth, or position still showed respect for those with less reason to claim such an advantage. Furthermore, Amishtown appeared to be far more collectivist than the other communities. Individual achievement tended to be subordinated to group achievement, and the school's official mission reflected this perspective.

With its influx of suburban commuters, Hilltown differed from the other communities in terms of "uncertainty avoidance." Recent suburban residents, as well as some new teachers and administrators, were interested in adopting school practices that went beyond tradition. Comparison of the way discipline was handled at the three high schools, for example, revealed a somewhat more innovative focus at Hilltown. While suspension, expulsion, and paddling were part of the discipline regimes at Lumberville and Flint, a benign form of in-school suspension, where time-out from the regular classroom was coupled with academic support, was being used at Hilltown.

In several of the communities, principals seemed also, on occasion, to promote changes or to use practices that community members saw as too discordant to be immediately acceptable. For example, parents and community members in Amishtown perceived the change to an innovative mathematics curriculum as so abrupt that many of them became uncomfortable, and the complexities of the large district size appeared to make leadership in Flint more impersonal than the residents would have preferred.

These illustrations of cultural dissonance also provided some clues about how community members reacted when leadership practices ceased to fit in with their expectations: through the means they had available to them, they tried to put pressure on school leaders. In Amishtown, the principal responded to such pressure by inviting community members into the school to talk about and work out the problem. By contrast, in Flint, school leaders were resisting community pressure to "deconsolidate" the schools and were in the process of fighting with community members for control.

As these examples suggest, critical incidents in which leadership deviates from community expectations gives school leaders a choice. Like the principal at Amishtown, they can negotiate with the community in an effort to make their own motives and methods intelligible. Or, as was the case in Flint, they can dig in their heels and attempt to prevail despite community resistance. Views of schools as extensions of community and as critical institutions for community-building are likely to support the former approach in all but the most toxic communities.

Findings from this study add to insights about culturally responsive leadership that were represented in earlier work contributed by Phillip Hallinger and his colleagues (Hallinger, Bickman & Davis, 1996; Hallinger & Heck ,1998; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998a; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998b; Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000; Hallinger & Kantamara, 2001) as well as several others (e.g., Bolman & Deal, 1992; Dwyer, 1985). In general, our findings, like those of these earlier researchers, positioned "cultural responsiveness" as a negotiation between community culture and organizational culture. In order to be effective, leadership had to fit within a schema that was comprehensible to members of the local culture. But once this kind of "fitting in" (i.e., cultural resonance) led the community to acknowledge the legitimacy of the principal, he or she had some leverage to offer perspectives and advocate practices that the community did not immediately read as culturally consonant (see Useem, Christman, & Boyd, 2006 for a discussion of leadership legitimacy in educational organizations). In other words, the community's determination that the principal was culturally responsive actually enabled the principal to work in opposition to those cultural values and practices that he or she saw as unproductive.

The finding that culturally responsive principals mediate between local cultural expectations and their own educational "visions" suggests that boards of education might be well advised to challenge and perhaps alter their tacit assumptions about the characteristics of effective leaders. Notably, when they engage in succession planning or seek to fill key leadership positions, boards might want to make sure their

criteria are not so narrow as to effectively exclude school leaders with relevant cultural competencies. Nor should boards assume that experience in the district necessarily represents good preparation for leadership there. Instead, they might want to attract applicants who appreciate and understand the local culture, exhibit flexibility and negotiation skills sufficient to enable them to be effective "border crossers" (e.g., Alston, 2004), and articulate views about educational aims and strategies that take the community's best interests to heart.

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